The Cleveland Museum of Art

Cleveland Museum of Art Acquires Pre-Columbian Gold

News Release
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CLEVELAND (May 5, 2015) – With the purchase of twelve gold objects the Cleveland Museum of Art has transformed its collection of Pre-Columbian art. The objects were made in Central and South America—regions that are legendary for their extraordinary metalwork—and range in date from AD 1 to 1550. The group consists of prime examples of the most important and striking types of Pre-Columbian gold metalwork. Notable are an unusually large pendant in the form of a stylized figure (2015.1), a pectoral featuring an enigmatic face framed by enormous ear and nose ornaments (2015.2), and a large beaker in the shape of a head (2015.6). The group also contains more intimate objects, such as finial caps that would have been mounted on the ends of staffs as emblems of social or religious rank. The finials are intricately worked, engaging sculptural representations of birds and animals (2015.3-5).

“This is an exceptionally exciting and transformative acquisition that greatly enriches the Cleveland Museum of Art’s collection of ancient American art” said William M. Griswold, the museum’s director. “We are thrilled to announce that these rare Pre-Columbian gold objects will go on public view in a special focus exhibition.”

Gold of the Ancient Americas will be on view in the Cleveland Museum of Art’s Arlene M. and Arthur S. Holden Gallery beginning May 16 through June 21, 2015. After the exhibition closes, the objects will be installed in the permanent collection galleries devoted to the Pre-Columbian world.

The works are from a U.S. private collection formed in the late 1960s. The museum conducted thorough research to assure that the acquisition complies with collecting standards established by UNESCO.

Pre-Columbian Gold: Isthmian Region

***Figural Pendant,* AD 1-800. Isthmian Region (Colombia), Tolima. Gold (cast and hammered); 29.4 x 16.2 x 1 cm. Severance and Greta Millikin Fund 2015.1.**

Pendants in the form of arrestingly abstracted figures, often with X-shaped bodies, are an iconic type for which the metal artists of Colombia's Tolima region are well-known. Such figures seem to be based on the human form but also incorporate animal features, often an up-turned, bifurcated tail sometimes compared to that of a serpent or another animal. Surely worn by a chief, this exquisitely worked pendant is one of the largest of its kind.

***Pectoral (Chest Ornament),* AD 1-800. Isthmian Region (Colombia), Calima (Yotoco period). Gold (hammered); 22.7 x 28.5 x 2.9 cm. Severance and Greta Millikin Fund 2015.2.**

Bi-lobed pectorals are one of the most important and striking object types from Colombia's Calima region. The pectorals center on an enigmatic, high-relief human head with closed or squinting eyes and enormous ear and nose ornaments that obscure the lower portion of the face. Chiefs apparently wore the pectorals—among the largest torso adornments ever created in the ancient Americas—with suites of other gold objects, including arm bands and large, dramatic headdress ornaments that featured similar iconography.

***Finial with Owl, Finial with Long-beaked Bird, and Finial with Two Deer,* AD 400-1000. Isthmian Region (Colombia), Sinú (Zenú). Gold (cast); 11.4 x 7.2 x 6 cm, 11.1 x 4.3 x 9.5 cm, 6.8 x 4.3 x 7.4 cm. Severance and Greta Millikin Fund 2015.3-5.**

Colombia's Sinú (also, Zenú) region is best-known for distinctive gold finial caps. This impressive group features an alert owl with a huge crest; a dignified, long-beaked bird whose body contains a pellet that rattles when the finial moves; and two deer (or a single creature with two deer heads) that hold human-like hands over their chests. Some experts relate finial imagery to ancient beliefs about the cosmos. The finials are thought to be emblems of rank that were fitted over the ends of staffs or other implements.

***Lime Dipper or Pin with Owl,* AD 1-800. Isthmian Region (Colombia), Calima (Yotoco period). Gold (cast); 22.4 x 2 x 1.6 cm. Severance and Greta Millikin Fund 2015.10.**

Pin-shaped dippers are thought to have been used during rituals that involved chewing coca leaves; such practices have endured from antiquity to the present day in Andean South America. In antiquity, elite coca-chewing paraphernalia could become quite precious and artistically elaborate, nowhere more so than in southwestern Colombia, where the Calima region is located. A charming miniature owl forms the finial of this fine example.

***Feline Pendant,* AD 1000-1550. Isthmian Region (Panama-Costa Rica), Veraguas-Chiriquí. Gold (cast); 3.4 x 3 x 6.1 cm. Severance and Greta Millikin Fund 2015.11.**

This jaguar pendant is memorable for its essentialized rendering of the feline, its well-polished surface, and its rosy color, the result of copper in the alloy. The pendant represents a unified gold style that spread through adjacent regions of Panama and Costa Rica in the several centuries immediately before the Spanish conquest and featured representations of the region’s rich fauna.

***Insect Bell Pendant,* AD 400-1100. Isthmian Region (Panama), Coclé. Gold (cast); 2.2 x 1.1 x 2.4 cm. Severance and Greta Millikin Fund 2015.12.**

A clapper within the body of this beautifully detailed, small insect pendant makes a bell-like sound when moved. The pendant was made in the Coclé region of central Panama during one of the heydays of metalworking there.

Pre-Columbian Gold: Central Andean Region

Head Beaker, **AD 900-1100. Central Andes (Peru), Lambayeque (Sicán). Gold (hammered); 23.5 x 19.8 cm. Severance and Greta Millikin Fund 2015.6.**

The Peruvian north coast, where the Lambayeque people (also, Sicán) made their home, was one of the premiere locations for metallurgical arts in the New World. The beaker serves as a signature type for Lambayeque metal production. This large, harmoniously proportioned example features the head of a personage who may represent either the society's principal deity, its divinity signaled by the feline-like fangs in the mouth, or the deified founder of the Lambayeque dynasty. It is not known why the head appears upside-down on such beakers.

***Beaker with Frontal Figures, Beaker with Shells, and Beaker with Frogs,* AD 900-1100. Central Andes (Peru), Lambayeque (Sicán). Gold (hammered); 12.5 x 9.1 cm, 14.6 x 10.2 cm, 13.7 x 12.1 cm. Severance and Greta Millikin Fund 2015.7-9.**

These three, small, relief-ornamented gold beakers were created by Lambayeque (also, Sicán) artists on Peru's north coast during the two-century apogee of their remarkable metalworking tradition, and all exemplify the beaker form that serves as one of the tradition's hallmarks. All are fine examples of their type, and the group demonstrates a representative range of beaker iconography. They may have figured in feasting events that were important in the political, social, and religious life in the Andes.

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About the Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art is renowned for the quality and breadth of its collection, which includes more than 63,000 artworks and spans 6,000 years of achievement in the arts. The museum is a significant international forum for exhibitions, scholarship and performing arts and is a leader in digital innovations. One of the top comprehensive art museums in the nation, recognized for its award-winning Open Access program and free of charge to all, the Cleveland Museum of Art is located in the University Circle neighborhood.

The museum is supported in part by residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture and made possible in part by the Ohio Arts Council (OAC), which receives support from the State of Ohio and the National Endowment for the Arts. The OAC is a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally and economically. For more information about the museum and its holdings, programs and events, call 888-CMA-0033 or visit cma.org [1].

Press Announcements [2]

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